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Diary Dearest

The wisdom of resident aliens.

The first time I ever heard of Tina Brown (*Vanity Fair, The New Yorker*, etc.) was in the early 70's. There she was, splashed across the front page of the prestigious *London Sunday Times*, surrounded by her diaries. Barely out of her teens, Tina was—and perhaps still is—an enthusiastic diarist. I read the article because I, too, was a diary fanatic. For years I wrote pages and pages. At one point my obsession with documenting every detail of my life became problematic; some days all I could write was, "Wrote in my diary." Still, I hoped that when I reached Tina's age, my diaries would be splashed all over papers.

In the end, my diaries did get splashed around—all over the school notice board. As a teenager, I was dispatched to a barbaric boarding school barely out of the 18th century where I was tortured for being a wuss. Pages from my homesick writings were torn out and pinned up for all to see. What's worse, I was in love with the captain of the cricket team and had written all about it. Suddenly I was famous, but this was not the kind of fame I had longed for.

My next big mistake with diaries was to sneak into my boyfriend's room at Oxford and read his. Although there can be no excuse for this kind of behavior, I can only plead that I was obsessed. I got what I deserved; feverishly turning the pages, I read that he did not love me and that he was only tolerating me to get close to the girl with whom I was roommates.

It was after this cumulation of disasters that I decided that writing diaries was not a good idea and I stopped. But I still like to read them, although I limit myself to published ones. I just read Quentin Crisp's recently published *Resident Alien: The New York Diaries* (Alyson). I first became aware of Crisp in my teenage diary-writing years through John Hurt's portrayal in the TV play *The Naked Civil Servant*. Disbarred from the service during the war, Crisp nevertheless saw active duty on the streets of London, servicing the G.I. Joes. "Do you want another piece of gum and we do it again?" asked one Yank stud as he lay in bed with Crisp. It was all so free, so unembarrassed, so joyous. I remember then and there setting my sights on America, arriving in the East Village a couple of years after Crisp himself—at the ripe old age of 71—had moved there.

Although he called his diaries *Resident Alien*, Crisp also toyed with the title *I Serve in Heaven*, since "Manhattan has far exceeded my expectation of happiness" (in contrast to his life in England, which he has retrospectively titled *I Rule in Hell*). I could not have put it better myself, and while reading these diaries, I realized that if I had written a diary, I would have wanted it to be like this. Anything I might have said he has already written with a wit and eloquence that are almost divine.

Crisp delights in the wide divide between hellacious Britain and fantastic America: How you can get a turkey sandwich here any day of the week, a luxury seen as blasphemous in Britain, where the dead bird only appears at Christmas. How, as he swishes about on the streets, people are more likely to say "Well, my! You've got it all on today," whereas in Blighty, "people stood with their faces six inches from mine and hissed, 'Who do you think you are?'" Crisp was dumbfounded. "What a stupid question," he writes. "It must have been obvious that I didn't think I was anyone else...here, in New York, there are so many different sexes that the freaks go unnoticed."

Not so unnoticed, however, that Crisp—now in his 80s—has become, to his bemusement, a celebrity able to survive on a diet of peanuts and champagne as he floats from function to function. Given his policy of never saying no to anything, he even enjoyed the attentions of the club kids, shaking a tail feather at the opening of Disco 2000 (not that he enjoyed the music, which he dismissed as "the most noise conveying the least information"). Of the club kids' visual style, he merely observes, "the wish to allure has given way to the desire to appall."

But Crisp is nobody's poster child. He remains unseduced by the whistles and bells of the gay community: "No such happy confederacy exists," he states with perfect finality. Gay pride has blinded many to simple gay awareness, with the result that Crisp has sometimes been condemned for these and similar remarks, which are simply too acute for activists to comprehend. Meanwhile, he is a committed inactivist. "I retired at birth," he says. He knows that "it is never the law that changes the world's attitudes: it is public opinion that gradually modifies the law." In his experience, "prejudice is like a cactus; it flourishes without any discernible sense of nourishment."

On a broader scale, Crisp identifies a number of professions that are not what they seem. "Just as religion is for evangelists, not for congregations, and education is for teachers, not for students, so politics are for politicians, not for voters," he states. "The people who enter these professions are those who cannot live within their income of praise...they want to rule the world and they want to be loved, and this is not possible." From this he also observes, "It is an unalterable law that people who claim to care about the human race are utterly indifferent to the sufferings of individuals." It is perhaps for this reason that he considers Earth "a courageous global experiment that failed."

Crisp's diaries gracefully glide from these dark observations to hilarious asides like this one about Halloween: "It's a long time since I have tricked and I have never treated." But the diaries, for their clarity of insight and absence of humbug, are one long treat indeed. And when Tina Brown publishes her own resident alien diaries with a great deal of fanfare and hoopla, remember that Crisp's unassuming volume was launched with barely a murmur. ★

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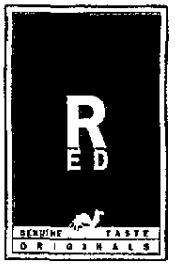

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BUCKLEY

[Cont. from 24] night gig at a hole-in-the-wall club called Barrister's. With the band due in, he was eager to begin recording. "Everything's in black and white now," he told Bowen. "The band's coming down, and then . . . and then we'll have color."

He'd vowed to get a car but was getting around by bicycle and the kindness of not-quite strangers. Music writer Robert Gordon had met Buckley at Easley Studios during the Verlaine sessions; Buckley's cottage was Gordon's find, on the street where he and his wife, Tara, lived. "If you've moved somewhere by yourself, you know it's a time to shed an old skin," says Gordon. "I think he came here to woodshed." But Buckley would come to dinner at the Gordons' house wearing suspenders and green sharkskin; he'd sing to their newborn and drink his big coffees: "He had this energy inside of him, this excitement about everything. That vitality came out in his music. That he wanted to get into the river was totally characteristic; what my wife says is true – the thing that killed him is also what made him who he was. Most people *talk* about the river, but they don't go to it."

Andria Lisle, a Memphis record-store manager who lived around the corner from Buckley and became a steady, platonic companion during the singer's five months in Memphis, remembers him as existing there "like a kitten that would go from house to house, and everyone would do for him. He'd just show up and then go to the next house and get fed there, too. He lived for the moment – spontaneous, very flirtatious, full of whimsy, mischievous. But he knew he was so blessed, and he was so committed to life."

Lisle went with him to Al Green's church. Afterward, Buckley ate two massive soul-food platters while the restaurant staff watched. The last time she saw Buckley was about 7:30 on the night he died. "Jeff and Keith [Foti] drove up, and Jeff was so excited," Lisle recalls. "He'd gone to open a bank account, to get a car; he was going to buy the house he was living in, and he was walking on air about his boys coming in. We'd planned to go to a casino, but he wanted to go play the drums."

Instead, he went to the river. Standing above the channel 10 days later, Gene Bowen considers it all: "The objective originally was just to go down there and – you know, the sun was setting; it's beautiful here, with the breeze – and play some music and sing. And then he just wanted to go in."

"He was unpredictable," says Keith Foti. "That was the beauty about Jeff. Every moment was an expression." ●

PUFFY

[Cont. from 56] the Peterson Automotive Museum, in L.A.'s mid-Wilshire district.

I ask Combs how security-minded he had been about the L.A. appearances. "Oh," he says, "there was definitely extra security for L.A. That was based on that whole vibe that had been in the media."

I start to ask him whether there had been any threats prior to the events, but he shakes his head and looks down at his hands folded in his lap.

"I'll tell you about the whole night," he says softly. "Biggie was supposed to go to the studio that day. He didn't want to go to the studio. He was like, 'I finished my album. I just want to celebrate with you. I just want to have a good time. Let's go to this *Vibe* joint. I want to go there. Hopefully I can meet some people, let them know I want to do some acting.' That made me proud. He was thinking like a businessman. He wanted to pursue his acting stuff. So, we at the party. He had a broken leg; he couldn't walk or dance, so we sitting down. I'm real hyper, so I usually get up and walk around the party. He's like, 'Yo, Puff, tonight could you just sit here with me all night?' And I thought, 'Cool. We just gonna sit here and kick it.' I sat there. We kicked it. We had a good time. We was drinking and listening to records, sitting at the table the whole night. And he was just being nice. He was nice naturally, but he was being extra nice. He was . . . chipper. He's proud of himself, talking about how stuff's going to be when the album comes out, and how it's going to be better. He's like, 'I'm gonna make them love me.' He was talking about the West Coast. He was like, 'I can't wait till they hear that track "Going Back to Cali," so they know I ain't got nothing but love for them.'

"So the party's over, and he's still talking, saying, 'Yo, Puff. It's gonna be so big this time. I just can't wait. We gonna really do it.' And I'm like, 'All right, we need to get up out of here.' So we going out to the parking lot, and my car's in front of his car. I make a right – he's right behind us. But not *right* right behind us. We get to a light, and we waiting there for him. And then the car pulls up. Then we cross the light. As we crossing the light, I hear shots ring out. I ducked down. I'm thinking somebody's shooting, and I've been at parties before where people do that, shoot into the air. And then somebody in my car looked back, said Biggie's car had been hit. I jump out the car while the car's moving. I know if his car was hit, he's still in the car – because he can't walk. So I run toward the car. And it's just him and his best friend. Everybody else had jumped out the car and ran. His best friend, Damien, is there. And I'm there, and Biggie's

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